Why should we care about the arts?

Descrizione

Many things are disappearing from the political agenda: the emerging economic paradigm is totally ignored, as if nothing had happened in the most recent years showing the final breath of manufacturing capitalism; the new social complexities are feared, as if we could set the world's clock back to the colonial age; the environment is considered only when it smells of business; the redistribution of roles and power in a society whose leading value is knowledge is viewed as a threat for the consolidated boxes in which individuals and groups are comfortable although mummified.

In such a reluctancy against changes the arts and culture have been totally eliminated from any discussion, and almost no program takes them seriously. Many professionals still enjoy complaining about our permanent emergency: according to their oleographic view we are under siege by a horde of barbarians and nobody provides culture with adequate funds. The arts and culture still appear in the news and in the debate only when some masterpiece is overpaid in auctions, or some disaster occur. The discussion is still drawn with ethical colours, painting culture as a religion rather than a pleasure.

Culture is simply ignored. For what it counts, can we identify any responsibility? Contemporary society is quite sophisticated and creative: we have never written so much, our expressive urgencies are usefully stimulated and diffused through the web 2.0 where we generate contents just like the medieval monks copying manuscripts and inventing new and unexpected ways to represent the world. In a paradigm based upon relationship, proximity and experience culture is the natural candidate for providing us with atmospheres, tools and channels through which we can exchange and share values and contents, desires and hopes.

The present setting of the cultural system is the real obstacle against any possibility for culture to come back to our everyday life, getting full citizenship in our pursuit of normality and happiness. Although some recent initiatives focus upon the role of culture as a powerful driver for growth, maybe emphasizing too much the financial profiles of a more complex process, culture remains isolated and depicts itself as special, and devoted to a milieu of initiated people. We still keep almost 80% of museum endowment deposited (our invisible heritage); opera costs a lot and only a few enjoy it, in the wake of the financial default of opera houses; foreign contemporary art is bought by many italians in foreign auctions and fairs; the arts and culture are nowhere if we consider the urban trails of our normal lives.

While culture waits for some unlikely miracle to happen, many things occur. Some theatres, art galleries and public buildings have been occupied with loud voice and weak projects; once the extraordinary atmosphere of unconventional actions will fade away, legitimate artistic urgencies will not be supported by any strategy addressing the perspective audience and the emerging markets for the arts. The recently published book “Kulturinfarkt” (by Haselbach, Klein, Knüsel and Opitz) simply describes the terminal stage of culture in the European system dominated by public financial support and low accountability. The heart attack has already affected culture, the question is: when will it become irreversible?

Maybe a wide proportion of our society still neglects culture; it is not surprising, if we consider the efforts of cultural supply to appear distant, exclusive and tedious. Institutions are often afraid of cultural text, rejecting unconventional and stimulating artistic projects. In 2008 a sculpture by Martin Kippenberger, exhibited in the Museion at Bozen, was at the centre of loud and angry protests arguing that it would offend the religion; the Museion luckily ignored such medieval complaints and kept the work in the exhibition.

A few days ago the MAXXI in Rome rejected the movie “Girlfriend in a coma” by Bill Emmot and Annalsa Piras; it is a work on the social and cultural decline of Italy, a phenomenon that nobody could deny. Its première was prohibited arguing that it could pollute the electoral campaign; in such a way it is clear that even the simple act of

thinking is considered subversive. On february, 2nd, the writer Silvia Ballestra tweeted: “The only consolation in the painful story MAXXI-Melandri is that politics fears movies and books (which therefore still have a sense)”.

Too many decades in the ivory tower have dried almost any opportunity to evolve with a fast and imaginative society. Feudal privileges and apocalyptic niches still remain the main worry for many cultural professionals and organisations. The absence of highly reputed string quartets in the Italian concert system depends upon the shared refusal of playing as second violin; although its part is complex and fundamental it does not appear as the leader: the Italian music teaching system tries to produce superstars but does not manage to generate musicians. The countries where amateurial music is practiced in the adoscence years end up to dominate the world ranking of industrial innovation and competitiveness. Creativity is based upon reciprocal listening and lateral thinking.

In order for culture to own a specific constructive role for our growth, welfare and happiness we need to consider its unique abilty to craft extraordinary individuals and fertile groups connecting the emotional, the cognitive and the intellectual spheres, and therefore combining our ability to fertilise intuition and knowledge. The essays by Ludovica Scoppola on music teaching at schools and by Elena Bazzanini on the arts in children’s development touch a major naked nerve in the Italian cultural and social system. Only when the arts will be given a central position in our public and private agenda then society will prefer relationship to competition, proximity to standardisation, creativity to imitation. This is the challenge.

Campi meta